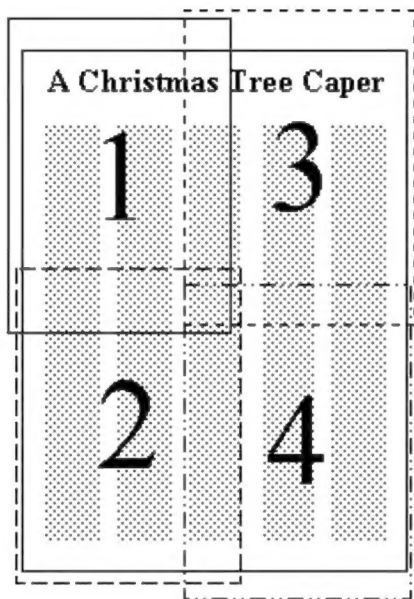


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.



TERRY

SAFELY LANDED AT THE AIR-RESCUE ALBATROSS' BASE IN THE PHILIPPINES, BUCKY IS TORN BETWEEN CONFLICTING PICTURES OF HIS FUTURE—AS TERRY'S SKILLED AIRMAN, OR GUIDON'S TWO-FISTED FIGHTING MAN.

GOLLY, BUCKY, LIKE MAJOR LEE AND POP SAID—GUESS YOU'VE GOT TO DECIDE.

I KNOW... THEY BOTH SOUND RIGHT...

BUT I JUST DON'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO GET READY FOR!



How Near to My Heart

By JACK RITCHIE

(© 1961 by News Syndicate Co. Inc.)

ROBERT CONNELL'S mind wandered from the adventure story he had been trying to read. Seventy per cent of all women eventually married men who lived within 10 blocks of their homes. Propinquity. Robert had once heard that.

He reflected on that statistic and then considered Philia Granger. She lived at 169th with her parents and Robert had an apartment at Howell and 165th. Six blocks. He had met her at a house-warming party.

Strange that Philia should be invited to a house-warming.

The cross-country bus swerved slightly and Robert inadvertently nudged the dark-haired girl sharing his seat. "Sorry."

She smiled briefly. "Quite all right."

Robert moved an inch closer to the aisle and re-focused his attention back to the magazine. Somebody was trying to get a schooner over a reef and into the lagoon. Or, was it the other way around?

Philia Granger. Blonde. Six blocks. Were all blondes so . . . so . . . Robert remembered that once he had checked the thermometer in the Granger home. Seventy-four. He could have sworn the temperature wasn't a degree above sixty-five.

They were trying to get the schooner into the lagoon.

HE PASSED TEST WITH THE GRANGERS

But all the Grangers liked him. In their reserved way. And they had studied him. Mr. Granger. Mrs. Granger. And Philia. Very objectively. Robert reflected un-

of course, but still a vice president with his own office and 50% of a secretary.

He became aware that the girl was now covertly studying him.

Robert was conscious of a light pleasing perfume. He resolutely turned a page of his magazine.

Just a question of asking Philia. But of course it was just a question of asking Gwen, too.

Gwen Regan. 172d St. at Clark. Eight blocks. Black hair, small blue eyes. He had met her at a bowling alley. Average 161. She skied in the winter and skin-dived in the summer.

Vivacious. That's what everybody said. Vivacious. But Robert had the uneasy feeling that she was just nervous.

The bus pulled into the small Jonathan Falls depot and the driver announced a 20-minute stop. Robert followed the dozen or so passengers into the diner next door.

He noticed that the girl had also apparently decided to have something to eat. She took a stool on the opposite side of the horseshoe counter.

She had deep blue eyes and she ordered a bacon and tomato sandwich.

Suppose I sneak back to the bus and take the seat next to the window? Robert considered the thought and dismissed it as underhanded and unworthy. He would have to resume reading

look. Was it really cool and detached? Or was there just . . . nothing?

He was waiting on the aisle side of the bus seat when the auburn-haired girl returned to the bus. He got up.

She smiled. "Why don't you take the window seat? I wouldn't want to monopolize all the scenery."

Robert was pleased by the generosity. Just like her, he thought. Then he realized that he couldn't possibly know whether it was just like her. Nevertheless he felt positive it was.

"No, thank you," he said. "I've been this way any number of times and I've virtually memorized every hill and tree. And besides, I have something to read."

They resumed their original seating, the bus moved, and Robert opened his magazine.

EXPLAINS WHY HE SHOOK HIS HEAD

Gwen Regan. He suspected that she would see to it that his bowling average improved. He would have to take skiing lessons. He would have to improve his skin-diving technique. He wondered how many nights a week they would just stay home.

Robert now remembered about shaking his head in the diner. He turned to the girl beside him. "Sometimes I shake my head. But it doesn't mean anything. I'm just thinking."

The girl smiled. "Sometimes I shrug my shoulders. When I think the occasion demands it."

Was she making fun of him? He went back to his magazine.

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HE PASSED TEST WITH THE GRANGERS

But all the Grangers liked him. In their reserved way. And they had studied him. Mr. Granger. Mrs. Granger. And Philia. Very objectively, Robert reflected uncomfortably. Weighing and balancing.

Robert's mother had once looked at him in almost the same way. "Robert, you're bright enough, the Lord knows, but you do give the impression that you're not paying attention."

He had passed the test with the Grangers. Perhaps not with a high mark, but he was quite certain he had passed. Now it was just a matter of asking Philia the final question.

Robert's eyes went to a stretch of the passing countryside. He could have taken the company plane back to the city, but the distance from the branch store at Fond du Lac was only ninety miles and Robert preferred a ground's-eye view of the green Kettle Moraine hills.

Unfortunately, he had barely made this bus and there had been only one remaining vacant seat — on the aisle. Now this girl was watching the scenery while he was forced to read.

He glanced at her for an instant. Brown hair? No. Perhaps more auburn. Nice profile. About 25.

AWARE GIRL WAS STUDYING HIM

He went back to his magazine. They were over the reef and on the beach. The local chieftain came to greet them. Me-fella head man. You come island belong to me. Stay, take, eat, walk about. Continued Page 112. Robert turned to 112 and did some thumbing. Ten pages more? He sighed. Oh, well.

Why shouldn't the Grangers like him? After all, he was barely 30 and already a vice president in the Mildridge chain of department stores. Very junior,

body said. Vivacious. But Robert had the uneasy feeling that she was just nervous.

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Suppose I sneak back to the bus and take the seat next to the window? Robert considered the thought and dismissed it as underhanded and unworthy. He would have to resume reading when he got back to the bus. This Reena. Girl-child belong me. Pretty face. Strong. Good. Man-fella-like? Robert shuddered and shook his head.

He flushed. Across the counter the girl had been looking up and seen him shake his head.

He had . . . well . . . he had just been sitting here and suddenly he had shaken his head. Physically. For no apparent reason. To her. She must think that he was a little bit . . .

She looked intelligent. Robert had never been afraid of intelligent women. He had always worried about that, but there it was.

Philia. That cool and detached

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got to go."

She nodded. "She'll throw her-
self into the volcano to placate
the angry gods because her lover
broke a taboo. The lava flow will
stop and her lover will be saved
from the wrath of the tribe.
He'll sail away very sad, but
single."

Reena leaped into the volcano
just as the bus entered the fringe
of the city.

Robert closed his magazine.
Philia or Gwen? He would have
to make up his mind. What
would Gwen do if he didn't ask
her to marry him? Throw her-
self into a volcano? Not on her
bowling night. Or Philia? Glacier
versus lava?

He chuckled.

The girl smiled. "You're think-
ing again?"

"I'm afraid so." Suppose he
didn't choose either of them?
They might actually be ... re-
lieved?

At that instant Robert felt in-
credibly free. I've beaten the 10-
block syndrome, he thought tri-
umphantly. Of course, now that
leaves a void in my life, but still
... He sat there enjoying the
void.

After a while he glanced at his
watch. It was rather late. He
decided that he would get off at
the 165th St. stop and go home
rather than ride the bus to the
depot, and walk on to his office.

He reached toward the buzzer,
but the girl was pressing it.

"This is my stop," she said.

Robert was still smiling hap-
pily. "Mine too. I live at 165th
and Howell."

"169th and Macon," she said.
"I still have to take a local bus."

Robert automatically calculated
the distance from his apartment
to 169th and Macon. Thirteen

time to say a polite good-by and
never see each other again.

Robert experienced a sudden
reluctance to do so. He pulled the
magazine out of his pocket.
"Really one of the finest issues
I've read. Why don't you take it
home with you?"

She tilted her head slightly in
question.

"Of course I value this mag-
azine highly," Robert said swiftly.
"And so, after you've read it,
I'd appreciate it if I could pick
it up."

A smile flickered on her lips
and she took the magazine.
"Harley Apartment. Doris Ran-
dall."

In her apartment, Doris Randall
found a sheet of blank paper.
Nine blocks to Howell, and four
blocks west over to his apartment.
She created a right triangle. Now
let's see. ... The square of the
hypotenuse is equal to the sum
of the squares of the two sides.

It was 9.9 blocks to his apart-
ment. As the crow flies.

She smiled. But it was a nice
smile and she thought about the
70% of all women who
eventually.

THE END

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"169th and Macon," she said. "I still have to take a local bus."

Robert automatically calculated the distance from his apartment to 169th and Macon. Thirteen blocks. He felt . . . safe.

He helped her out of the bus and they stood on the corner, still two strangers, and it was

ment. As the crow flies.

She smiled. But it was a nice smile and she thought about the 70% of all women who eventually.

THE END

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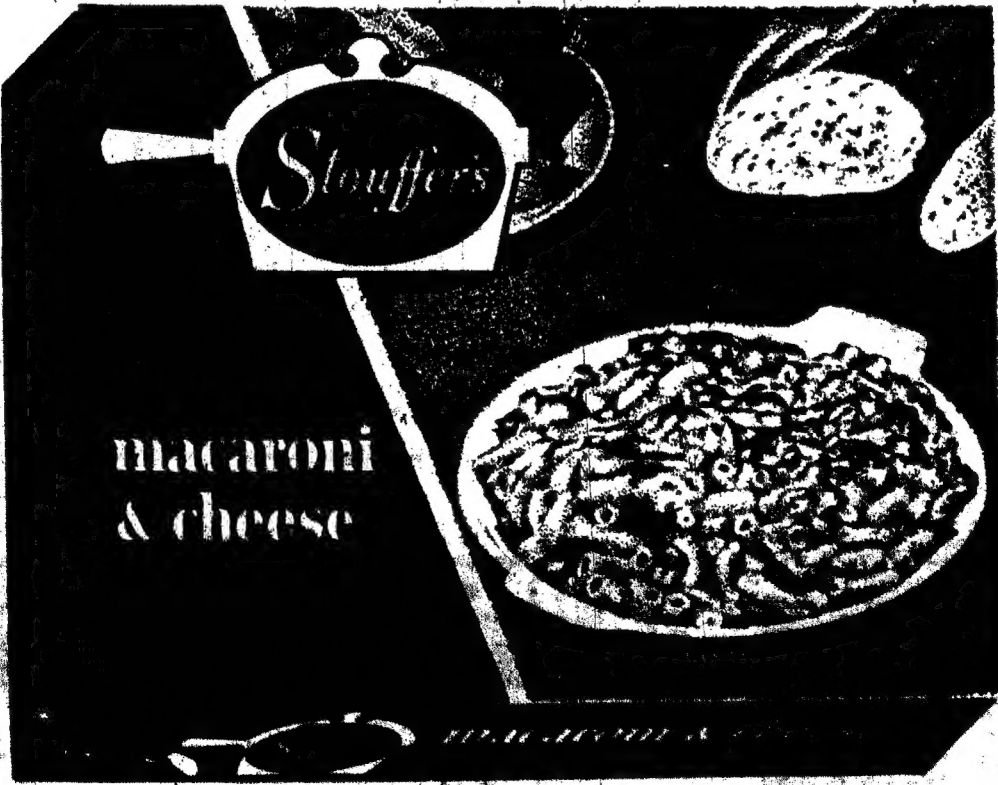
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